

The Argument

6. Barr: The National Tea Association cites tea's recent visibility in advertising and magazine articles as evidence of tea's increasing popularity. However, a neutral polling company, the Survey Group, has tracked tea sales at numerous stores for the last 20 years and has found no change in the amount of tea sold. We can thus conclude that tea is no more popular now than it ever was.

Which one of the following, if true, most seriously weakens Barr's argument?

- (A) The National Tea Association has announced that it plans to carry out its own retail survey in the next year. 
- (B) A survey by an unrelated polling organization shows that the public is generally receptive to the idea of trying new types of tea. 
- (C) The Survey Group is funded by a consortium of consumer advocacy groups. 
- (D) The stores from which the Survey Group collected information about tea sales are all located in the same small region of the country. 
- (E) Tea has been the subject of an expensive and efficient advertising campaign funded, in part, by the National Tea Association. 

PrepTest 44, Section 4, Question 5

Here's How to Crack It

Step 1: Assess the question This question might be familiar. Here it is again.

Which of the following, if true, most seriously weakens Barr's argument?

Clearly, you're out to weaken the argument.



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Step 2: Analyze the argument Read the argument carefully. Identify the conclusion, the premises the author offers as evidence, and any assumptions he or she makes. Here's the body of the argument.

Barr: The National Tea Association cites tea's recent visibility in advertising and magazine articles as evidence of tea's increasing popularity. However, a neutral polling company, the Survey Group, has tracked tea sales at numerous stores for the last 20 years and has found no change in the amount of tea sold. We can thus conclude that tea is no more popular now than it ever was.

Did you recognize this as a sampling argument? The conclusion suggests that tea has not gained in popularity over the last 20 years. What is the author's evidence? A survey/study. Whenever the argument uses a survey or poll or study as its premises, be on the lookout for flawed sampling reasoning.

What are the automatic assumptions that an author makes in a sampling argument? That the sample represents the larger group and that the sampling was conducted correctly. Here, the disagree purpose structure helps you as well. The author is disagreeing with the National Tea Association's position and using the study as evidence. He assumes that the data from the tracked stores applies to all tea sales everywhere.

Let's summarize:

- Author's conclusion: *Tea is no more popular now than it ever was.*
- Author's premises: *The Survey Group has found no change in the amount of tea sold at numerous stores over the last 20 years.*
- Author's assumption: *That the Survey Group data is representative of the tea market everywhere.*

Step 3: Act You're looking for evidence that the sample in the Survey Group's data is not representative, or that there is some problem with the way the Survey Group collected its information.

Step 4: Answer using Process of Elimination Be careful here. Because you're looking for a potential problem with the data, the right answer might seem out of scope because it introduces new information that doesn't necessarily refer to something in the body of the argument. Let's look at them one by one.

(A)

The National Tea Association has announced that it plans to carry out its own retail survey in the next year.

~~(D)~~

Does this show a potential problem with the data collected by the Survey Group? Even if the National Tea Association does plan to do its own survey, that doesn't invalidate the Survey Group's information. Eliminate it.

- (B) A survey by an unrelated polling organization shows that the public is generally receptive to the idea of trying new types of tea. 

Does this show a potential problem with the data collected by the Survey Group? Well, different results from a different source could potentially weaken the initial data. Keep this one for now.

- (C) The Survey Group is funded by a consortium of consumer advocacy groups. 

Does this show a potential problem with the data collected by the Survey Group? There is not enough information here to connect how the group is funded with the findings of the group. This is out of scope of the argument. Get rid of it.

- (D) The stores from which the Survey Group collected information about tea sales are all located in the same small region of the country. 

Does this show a potential problem with the data collected by the Survey Group? This is what you need to be careful of. The choice may seem irrelevant at first glance, but if all the stores were in the same region, it is possible that tea sales have increased in other regions. Weakening an argument doesn't require destroying it; casting doubt by pointing out how the data might not be representative of the larger group is all that's required of the credited response. This effectively weakens the argument.

- (E) Tea has been the subject of an expensive and efficient advertising campaign funded, in part, by the National Tea Association. 

Does this show a potential problem with the data collected by the Survey Group? Even if tea has been the subject of an advertising campaign, you don't know if the campaign worked or that tea has become more popular. Eliminate it.

You did keep (B) at first, but compared with (D), it's not as good. Just because people are more receptive to the idea of trying new types of tea does not prove that tea is more popular. Choice (D) does not require additional justification to make it weaken the argument, so it is the better choice.



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Summary: Weaken Questions

Remember these two key ideas when answering Weaken questions: the correct answer will probably attack one of the author's assumptions, and you should treat each answer choice as hypothetically true, looking for its direct negative impact on the conclusion. On more difficult Weaken questions, there will often be an appealing answer that, with just a little interpretation, looks right. The key is to avoid making any new assumptions when you try to determine the impact of an answer. Look to eliminate, not justify.

Sample Question Phrasings	Act
<i>Which one of the following, if true, would most undermine the author's conclusion?</i> <i>Which of the following statements, if true, would most call into question the results achieved by the scientists?</i>	• Identify the conclusion, premises, and assumptions of the author. • Read critically, looking for instances in which the author made large leaps in logic. • Then, when you go to the answer choices, look for a choice that has the most negative impact on that leap in logic. • Assume all choices to be hypothetically true.

LESSON 5: STRENGTHEN QUESTIONS

Strengthen questions are the flipside of Weaken questions. Now what you're asked to do is pick a new fact that confirms the conclusion, or at the very least, helps the conclusion seem more likely. If there are problems with the argument, the answer here will most often address them.

The Argument

7. Increases in the occurrence of hearing loss among teenagers are due in part to their listening to loud music through stereo headphones. So a group of concerned parents is recommending that headphone manufacturers include in their product lines stereo headphones that automatically turn off when a dangerous level of loudness is reached. It is clear that adoption of this recommendation would not significantly reduce the occurrence of hearing loss in teenagers, however, since almost all stereo headphones that teenagers use are bought by the teenagers themselves.

Which one of the following, if true, provides the most support for the argument?

- (A) Loud music is most dangerous to hearing when it is played through stereo headphones. 
- (B) No other cause of hearing loss in teenagers is as damaging as their listening to loud music through stereo headphones. 
- (C) Parents of teenagers generally do not themselves listen to loud music through stereo headphones. 
- (D) Teenagers who now listen to music at dangerously loud levels choose to do so despite their awareness of the risks involved. 
- (E) A few headphone manufacturers already plan to market stereo headphones that automatically turn off when a dangerous level of loudness is reached. 

PrepTest 44, Section 2, Question 7

Here's How to Crack It

Step 1: Assess the question As always, begin with the task at hand. Here it is.

Which of the following, if true, provides the most support for the argument?



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Note the use of the word *support* here. This word and the word *strengthen* are the two most frequently seen clues that you're looking at in a Strengthen question. As you'll see later, however, it's important to make sure what's supporting what on a question like this. You're asked to pick the *answer* that supports the *argument*. This is the pattern you see in Strengthen questions.

Step 2: Analyze the argument Once you've identified the question, you know how much analysis you need to do. As with Weaken and Assumption questions, start by finding the conclusion and the premises. Then look for the purpose or any patterns of reasoning. Here's the argument for this question.

Increases in the occurrence of hearing loss among teenagers are due in part to their listening to loud music through stereo headphones. So a group of concerned parents is recommending that headphone manufacturers include in their product lines stereo headphones that automatically turn off when a dangerous level of loudness is reached. It is clear that adoption of this recommendation would not significantly reduce the occurrence of hearing loss in teenagers, however, since almost all stereo headphones that teenagers use are bought by the teenagers themselves.

And here's a quick analysis.

- Author's conclusion: *It is clear that adoption of this recommendation would not significantly reduce the occurrence of hearing loss in teenagers.*
- Author's premises: *Teenagers buy their own headphones.*
- Author's assumption: *Since the purpose of this argument is to reject a proposed solution, it is assuming that teenagers will not buy the headphones that shut off when dangerous levels of loudness are reached.*

Step 3: Act Since the author does not come right out and say that teens won't buy the headphones, chances are that you'll find an answer that makes this connection. Failing that, you'll need to keep in mind that you're broadly looking for choices that agree with the author's conclusion. In this case, that the parents' headphone solution will not work.

The credited response to a Strengthen question will provide information in support of the conclusion, or it will weaken an alternate interpretation of the premises.